

Andrew C. Marshall: A Black Religious Leader of Antebellum Savannah

BY WHITTINGTON B. JOHNSON

His appearance was commanding, though he was neither stout nor tall. . . . His hair was of the clearest white and though truly African, it rose in unwonted profusion giving him the presence of a venerable patriarch. His teeth were white and beautifully clear. . . .

J. P. Tustin

AFRO-AMERICANS in antebellum Savannah lived in an interracial residential setting, but they worshipped in a mainly black setting. Savannah experienced a tremendous rate of growth in its black population during the fifty years from 1810 to 1860, when the number of black residents increased by almost 325 percent, from 2,725 to 8,417; included in these figures were 530 free blacks in 1810 and 705 in 1860.¹ According to an 1848 report every district and ward in Savannah had a significant number of black residents, including Monterey Ward, the city's smallest with only 18 residents, 9 of whom were black; and Oglethorpe Ward, one of the largest with 2,326 residents, 1,327 of whom were black.²

A sizable number (about one-third) of these black Savannahians attended church, usually an evangelical one. Although the Episcopal Church was the first religious institution in Savannah to have black worshippers and the Presbyterian Church had a visible presence, blacks did not attend either church in large numbers because the liturgy was unappealing, the preaching too intellectual, and the requirements for the priesthood too stringent. Furthermore, the hierarchical organi-

¹*Census of the United States for 1810: Third Census* (Washington, D.C., 1811); *Census of the United States for 1860* (Washington, D.C., 1864), 74.

²Joseph Bancroft, *Census of the City of Savannah*, 2nd ed. (Savannah, 1848), 15-20.

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zational structure of these churches, especially the Episcopal, discouraged control of the decision-making process at the parish level.

Afro-Americans sought a church that required less of its ministers educationally and emphasized calling over training; that preached to the heart, rather than to the intellect; that allowed its congregations to be autonomous; that required little congregational participation in the services, except to sing and pray; that was amenable to improvisation. They wanted a church where prayers came from the heart, not from books; where worshippers felt the spirit; where it was acceptable to say "amen."³

The scene depicted below portrays vividly the type of sermon and religious environment that appealed to most black Savannahians:

Last Sunday I went to the church of the Baptist Negroes here [in Savannah] with Mr. F. . . . The preacher . . . spoke extempore with great animation and ease. The subject of his discourse was the appearance of the Savior on earth and the purpose for which he came [the preacher described the visit to Savannah of a President, as the guest of a Mrs. Scarborough]. And when he came there he seated himself in the window. But a cord was drawn around the house to keep us Negroes and other poor folks from coming too near. . . . But the great gentlemen and the rich folks, they went freely up the steps and in the door and shook his hand. Now did Christ come in this way? Did he come only to the rich? did he shake hands only with them? No! Blessed be the Lord! He came to the poor! He came to us, and for our sakes. . . . Amen Hallelujah resounded through the chapel for a good minute or two and the people stomped with their feet and cried with countenance beaming with joy.⁴

Other than the vitality of its black churches, Savannah had little to commend itself to Afro-Americans. To whites, Savannah offered a charming city with beautiful squares, stately churches, an academy, a theatre, a historical society, a masonic

³Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1980), 132-33, 204; Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Right Reverend Richard Allen* (New York, 1960), 29-30.

⁴Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of Marica*, trans. Mary Howitt (New York, 1853), 1:352-54.

hall, and a hotel, but to blacks it offered almost nothing. The only black-owned public buildings were the black churches. Through their auxiliaries and clubs, these churches sponsored fairs, picnics, and banquets and supported missionary activities, schools, temperance societies, and fraternal organizations. Black churches were agents of social control, condemning drunkenness, immorality, and lawlessness and expelling those who failed to abide by their rules. But they were also places where Afro-Americans might go to relax and organize community entertainment.⁵ Savannah did not acquire its first black masonic order until after the Civil War, well over seventy-five years after Prince Hall had established the first black masonic lodge in this country.⁶

By virtue of his leadership in the church, the black preacher assumed a similar position in the black community. George Liele was the first black man of note to preach in Savannah, and Andrew Bryan the first to serve as pastor of a church, the First African Baptist Church. On January 20, 1788, Abraham Marshall, a white Baptist preacher, and Jesse Galphin, a black preacher, visited Brampton Plantation, on the outskirts of Savannah, where Andrew Bryan, his brother Sampson, and about forty other Afro-Americans held worship services in a barn that the plantation owner had given to Andrew Bryan. After examining and baptizing the group, Marshall and Galphin licensed Bryan to preach.⁷ Thus was born the first black church in Savannah. In less than two decades the church had grown so large that two new congregations were created from its membership: Second African Baptist Church (1802) and Ogeechee African Baptist Church (1803), located on the

⁵Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1976), 302-3; John W. Blassingame, "Before The Ghetto: The Making of the Black Community in Savannah, Georgia, 1865-1880," *Journal of Social History* 6 (Summer 1973): 474; H. Harlan, *John Jasper: A Case History in Leadership* (University of Virginia, 1936), 10.

⁶William H. Grimshaw, *Official History of Free Masonry Among the Colored People in North America* (New York, 1969), 265-66.

⁷Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 141; Henry C. Holcombe, *The Georgia Analytical Repository* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1802, microfilm), 1.4.186; Henry Holcombe, *The First Fruits in a Series of Letters* (Philadelphia, 1812), 63-65; "Letters Showing the Rise and Progress of the Early Negro Churches of Georgia and the West Indies," *Journal of Negro History* 1 (January 1916): 78.

Ogeechee River fourteen miles south of Savannah.⁸ First African Baptist Church remained the dominant black church in Savannah, and its pastor, Andrew Bryan, called "Daddy Bryan" by some of the members, was recognized as the community leader until his death in 1812. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the black religious community of Savannah had increased to five churches: three Baptist (excluding Ogeechee), one Methodist, and one Episcopal.⁹ Only the black Baptist churches, however, had black ministers. Furthermore, no blacks were members of the white Baptist churches.¹⁰

Because careers in medicine, law, education, and politics were not open to Afro-Americans, talented blacks found careers in the church, where the demands were awesome and the expectations high. Whites expected the black preacher to keep his flock in line, while blacks expected an electrifying emotional experience each worship service. Moreover black deacons, usually free Afro-Americans, occasionally were opinionated and obdurate. Because the majority of his members were slaves, the black preacher could expect little monetary compensation for his services and vehement white opposition if he were outspoken. On the other hand, his members were likely to disrespect him if he equivocated on the issue of race relations. Thus, in addition to being free, economically self-sufficient, and endowed with outstanding speaking ability, the black preacher in antebellum Savannah needed an uncommon amount of common sense. First African Baptist Church was fortunate in having two such persons to lead it during its formative years: first its founder Andrew Bryan and then, upon his death, Andrew C. Marshall, his nephew.

Afro-Americans had a very limited arena in which to exer-

⁸Holcombe, *The First Fruits*, 83; "Letters Showing the Rise and Progress," 86-87; Walter H. Brooks, "The Priority of the Silver Bluff Church and its Promoters," *Journal of Negro History* 7 (April 1922): 188.

⁹Bancroft, *Census of the City of Savannah*, 13-20 [He has the locations of First African and Second African reversed]; Joseph Atwell, *A Brief Historical Sketch of St. Stephen's Parish, Savannah, Georgia* (New York, 1874), 5; William Harden, *Recollections of a Long and Satisfactory Life* (Savannah, 1934), 27.

¹⁰According to the minutes of the 1840 meeting of the Sunbury Baptist Association, there were no black members of white churches and no white members of black churches in Savannah. Minutes of the Sunbury Baptist Association, 1818-1938 (University of Georgia, microfilm).

cise leadership—the black church. Even there, blacks in Savannah were restricted to their immediate congregations, because the Sunbury Baptist Association welcomed them as members but did not allow them to participate in leadership roles. Whatever creativity and innovativeness the black preacher possessed were reflected in the status of his church: the programs that it sponsored; its influence upon members; its growth in membership; the size and condition of its building; and its position within the pecking order of black churches. Accordingly, Andrew C. Marshall's credentials as a religious leader in antebellum Savannah are reflected in the fortunes of First African Baptist Church during his tenure as its pastor.

Andrew Marshall had the good fortune to live long (100 years) and well. He endured insulting punishment from the city fathers and blistering persecution from the white Baptist leaders, but eventually he succeeded in gaining their respect and recognition as an outstanding black religious leader. He was born a slave on a South Carolina plantation in 1755. His father, an English overseer who left the plantation to visit England while his slave mistress was pregnant with their second child, Andrew, allegedly had arranged with a mulatto overseer to provide for the family. The Englishman intended to manumit the family upon his return, but he died during that visit to England. Upon learning of his death, the mulatto overseer enforced a claim against the estate of the deceased, which resulted in the sale of the family. Andrew Marshall was sold to John Houstoun, governor of Georgia in 1778 and 1784 and mayor of Savannah in 1789.¹¹

Marshall apparently was devoted to his new master, whose life he saved, prompting Houstoun to manumit him in his will. Also while a slave of Houstoun, Marshall was married. After Houstoun's death in 1796, the executors of his estate refused to honor the manumission provision of the will and sold Mar-

¹¹I have not discoursed at length on the personal aspects of his life. For additional information on his family life, see J. P. Tustin, "Andrew Marshall, 1756-1856," *Annals of the American Pulpit*, ed. William Sprague (New York, 1859), 6:251-61; James M. Simms, *The First Colored Baptist Church in North America* (Philadelphia, 1888), 237-39; Edgar G. Thomas, *The First African Baptist Church of North America* (Savannah, 1925); Emanuel K. Love, *History of the First African Baptist Church From its Organization, January 20, 1788 to July 1st, 1888* (Savannah, 1888).

shall, an act that led to his running away rather than accepting the dissolution of his marriage. His escape caused the cancellation of the original deal. While Marshall was still at large, however, another deal was consummated with Joseph Clay, member of the Continental Congress from 1778 to 1780, justice of Chatham County in 1783, and successful businessman. Clay subsequently had him apprehended.¹²

The Judge was one of five masters Marshall had during his life of servitude. While working in these masters' homes and driving their carriages on trips, he was exposed to educational experiences which served him well throughout his life. Since Marshall could not write, he did not leave diaries and journals that might have given a clearer picture of how his exposure to Judge Clay, Governor Houstoun, and their contemporaries, including George Washington (whom he served as a body servant-driver during Washington's historic trip to Savannah in the 1790s)¹³ influenced his demeanor, dress, and manner of speech. Judging from contemporary descriptions of Marshall there was some influence, but how much is unknown.

Marshall spent over fifty years in servitude before purchasing his freedom with the two hundred dollars advanced by his last owner, Richard Richardson, a Savannah merchant and business associate of Marshall's previous master, Robert Bolton. The latter may have purchased him from the estate of Judge Clay, who died in 1804. Richardson had purchased Marshall with the intent of manumitting him. Subsequently, Marshall worked and saved sufficient funds to purchase the freedom of his second wife, Rachel, their four children, a stepson, and his father-in-law.¹⁴ Marshall probably was indebted to Judge Clay, Bolton, and Richardson for teaching him the business skills that he later used in his dray business. Moreover, he was encouraged to become self-employed by his maternal uncle, Andrew Bryan.

¹²Tustin, "Andrew Marshall," 254. I have assumed that these incidents happened but not at the time stated by Tustin, because his dates are incorrect. For instance, he said Governor Houstoun died when Marshall was twenty-one, which would have been in 1776.

¹³Tustin, "Andrew Marshall," 254; *Letters of Joseph Clay Merchant of Savannah, 1776-1793* (Savannah, 1913), 10; Simms, *The First Colored Baptist Church*, 237-38.

¹⁴Simms, *The First Colored Baptist Church*, 237-39.

In the early 1800s Marshall was assistant pastor of First African Baptist for several years and after Bryan's death served as its pastor, but later he lost interest in preaching. Before serving at First African Baptist, he was a member of Second African Baptist Church in Greene's Square, in what was then east Savannah. Henry C. Cunningham, a protégé of Bryan, was its pastor.¹⁵ Even though Marshall was in his fifties at the time, he had not displayed a commitment to the ministry. His behavior reflected an attitude that he had to preach because his uncle and role model was the most respected black preacher in Savannah.

Marshall operated a successful dray business, through which he became well known among the city's merchants. Parlaying to his advantage the skills learned as a slave coachman and the contacts established while a slave of successful merchants, he epitomized the advice that Booker T. Washington later gave to Afro-Americans: "Do for yourself, that which you would do for your employer." In 1824 Marshall owned several parcels of real estate (some which he rented to other Afro-Americans), a gig, and a slave. His real estate was assessed at eighty-four hundred dollars,¹⁶ the highest of any black in Savannah.

This prosperity did not come, however, without a price. Several years earlier, Marshall decided to build a house, a two-story brick structure, that befitted his status as a prosperous businessman. Unfortunately he purchased the materials from slaves who often sold similar materials to whites, a practice that was illegal. The city fathers, bent upon humiliating this ambitious black businessman, sentenced him to a public whipping.¹⁷ This punishment was quickly becoming associated with slaves, since public opinion considered it cruel and hence inappro-

¹⁵ Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, D.C., 1921), 112-13; Simms, *The First Colored Baptist Church*, 66, 76; David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denominations in North America and Other Parts* (Boston, 1813), 2:192. Benedict wrote that Bryan "is succeeded in the pastoral duties by his nephew Andrew Marshall."

¹⁶ Digest of City Taxes for 1824, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

¹⁷ Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, 112-13; Thomas, *The First African Baptist Church*, 46; Tustin, "Andrew Marshall," 258.

priate to administer to free men.¹⁸ Fortunately, his former master Richardson and other prominent whites interceded in his behalf, and as a consequence the constable was ordered not to scratch his skin or to draw blood.¹⁹

Well into his sixties by the mid-1820s, Marshall decided to commit himself to the ministry. This late-life career change was probably possible because Marshall was now financially secure enough to provide for his large family; he had twenty children by his two wives, but only five were still at home in 1826.²⁰ Although First African Baptist Church had a large congregation, it was comprised mainly of slaves, the vast majority of whom had no income. Even the free black members did not offer a guarantee that the church could support a pastor, because most of them were poor and had little money to give in support of their church. These members could scrape and sacrifice to contribute to special fundraising efforts of the church, but they could not sustain a consistent level of giving. Hence Marshall probably delayed entering the ministry until he did not have to depend upon the church for financial support. Moreover, Marshall probably concluded that God had spared him to reach the threshold of the biblical life expectancy of threescore and ten and that it was time to commit the remaining years of his life to preaching God's word. At the 1824 meeting of the Sunbury Baptist Association (SBA), Marshall accepted an appointment to preach in the Association's Domestic Missions program. He was commissioned to preach to "the blacks in the vicinity of Savannah," a job which he performed gratis for three months before being called back a second time to the pastorate of First African Baptist Church.²¹

His appointment in 1825 marked a turning point in the life of Andrew Marshall and in that of the church. Under Mar-

¹⁸Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956), 186; Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York, 1964), 187. Wade said public whippings were viewed as "the greatest disgrace which can befall them [slaves]."

¹⁹Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, 112-13; Tustin, "Andrew Marshall," 258.

²⁰Chatham County Register of Free Persons of Color 1826-1835, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

²¹Report of Standing Committee for Itinerant Preaching, Minutes of the Sunbury Baptist Association, November 1825.

shall's leadership church membership continued the extraordinary growth it had experienced under its founder; new auxiliaries were organized, and help to the needy was emphasized. Shortly after assuming leadership of this large congregation of over one thousand members, Marshall organized beneficial societies to care for the poor and infirm, especially those free Afro-Americans without means of assistance in their twilight years. These societies functioned like those in other black churches, providing "sick dues" to the disabled, as well as pensions to widows and children of deceased members, and requiring all members to visit shut-ins. Furthermore, mission work by females was encouraged long before such activities became generally accepted as a component of the black church.

In 1826 Marshall introduced another first in the church: a Sunday school. Marshall, who often alluded to his lack of formal education, was a self-educated man with a fine collection of books and good reading skills, but no writing skills. The Sunday school, which initially operated under the auspices of the Independent Presbyterian Church, emphasized behavior and obedience. The school had a weekly attendance of two hundred (predominantly slaves), and each week pupils were required to bring certificates of good conduct from their masters or guardians. Those with these certificates were singled out for special praise and given a ticket with a scriptural text, while those with bad conduct reports were ostracized and reprimanded. In 1835 control of the Sunday school was transferred to First African Baptist. It is very likely that reading skills were also taught in this Sunday school.²²

Under Marshall's leadership church membership increased significantly, many of these new members no doubt impressed with Marshall's preaching. The SBA, also impressed, invited him to preach at a Sunday service of the 1826 convention—the only time that a black was invited to preach to the body. In 1828 the church reported to the SBA that it had 2,275 mem-

²²Thomas, *The First African Baptist Church*, 47-48; Richard H. Haunton, "Savannah in the 1850's" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1968), 339-40; Harlan, *John Jasper: A Case History in Leadership*, 10. The latter two works do not address specifically the Sunday school at First African Baptist, but their findings support information found in the first source.

bers; this number increased to 2,417 in 1830, when the church also reported that 76 persons had been baptized since the last convention. The following year Marshall reported to the convention that he conducted a revival "the fruits of which was that 313 new members were added" to the church's roll.²³ This tremendous accomplishment reflected the mark of an outstanding evangelist. The church's membership far exceeded that of any other church in the Association and represented about twenty-five percent of the Association's aggregate membership.²⁴

Marshall, the church builder, now sought another place to hold services because the one in Yamacraw, which Andrew Bryan had built, could not comfortably accommodate its large membership. Coincidentally Savannah Baptist Church had decided to sell its property in Franklin Square and move to a new location. The asking price for the church and part of the lot on which it stood, excluding the parsonage and its lot, was fifteen hundred dollars. First African Baptist agreed to the terms of purchase and in May submitted a down payment of one thousand dollars, instead of the eight hundred stipulated in the contract; the remaining five hundred was submitted the following November as required.²⁵

At this memorable occasion in Marshall's ministry, a longstanding controversy over church doctrine erupted to present him with the most serious and potentially damaging challenge of his ministry. Eventually it led to a schism in First African Baptist which raised a question concerning the legitimate heirs of Andrew Bryan, a question that still has not been answered to the satisfaction of all parties. Marshall was accused by a majority of the deacons of embracing the theological views of Alexander Campbell, leader of a movement called "The Disciplines of Christ."²⁶ Upset over Marshall's allowing Campbell

²³Minutes of the Sunbury Baptist Association, November 1826, 1828, 1830, 1831.

²⁴Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denominations*, 532. I have estimated for the year 1831 based upon his figure for 1812.

²⁵Special meeting April 4, 1832. Mabel Freeman La Far, "The Baptist Church of Savannah Georgia: History, Records, and Register" (book manuscript, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia), 722-23; Love, *History of the First African Church*, 31.

²⁶Robert F. West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion* (New Haven, 1948), 223-26.

to preach in First African Baptist, these deacons and about 155 other members separated from the church and formed an autonomous congregation. This group continued to worship in the old church building after Marshall and the rest of the congregation had moved into the recently purchased former edifice of Savannah Baptist Church on Franklin Square (both groups agreed to this arrangement).²⁷ Subsequently, the Yamacraw congregation at the old edifice was referred to as Third African Baptist in all the Sunbury Baptist Association minutes and in communications between Savannah Baptist Church and the fledgling congregation.²⁸ In the eyes of antebellum Baptists, the Marshall-led group retained title to the original charter and the dissidents to the old building. Thus, both congregations may accurately claim longevity titles: First African Baptist to existence as a corporate body; First Bryan Baptist (present name of Third African Baptist) to worship on the same church site.

Savannah Baptist Church, also disturbed with Andrew Marshall over the Alexander Campbell issue, demanded that his members dismiss him from the "pastoral office." The text of Savannah Baptist's communication—or, more accurately, directive—indicates that the grave concern was not over Marshall's alleged embracing of Campbell's position but over the harm which his "false doctrines" would have upon the slave worshippers.²⁹ It was all right if Marshall had lost his soul, but their property (the church's slave members) must not be permitted to listen to him preach. When the blacks refused to dismiss Marshall and their white trustees supported them,³⁰ Savannah Baptist appealed to William T. Williams, mayor of Savannah, for help:

²⁷Love, *History of the First African Church*, 31.

²⁸A Digest of the Letters from the Churches, Minutes of the Sunbury Baptist Association, November 1833. The name Third African appears in all subsequent minutes through the Civil War. Discipline meeting, March 28, 1836, the Baptist Church of Savannah Georgia, 935-36.

²⁹Letter to John P. Williamson, July 22, 1833, La Far, "The Baptist Church of Savannah Georgia," 797-98.

³⁰Letter to Messrs. W. W. Nash, Thomas Dowell, and Oliver M. Lillibridge, July 26, 1833, *ibid.*, 798-800.

The individuals composing the first African church are in part the property of our citizens and it is for them if they feel any interest in their everlasting or temporal welfare to interpose and save them from the baneful influence of a designing man.³¹

This was an ominous scenario for Marshall, given the time frame. After Nat Turner's revolt in 1831 which left over fifty whites dead, many slave states enacted legislation circumscribing the assembling of large numbers of Afro-Americans and limiting the freedom of black preachers. An 1831 Georgia act proscribed free blacks and slaves from preaching to an assembly of more than seven unless licensed by justices or certified by three ordained ministers.³² Since Nat Turner was a black preacher who apparently disseminated "false doctrines" among his slave followers, the scene was set for Savannah officials to move in, drive Marshall from his pulpit, and mandate that First African Baptist become an appendage of the white church. To their credit, however, those officials did not intervene.

Marshall's troubles, nevertheless, were not over, because the Sunbury Baptist Association was also a party to the power play:

Resolved, that the First African Church, as a member of this Association on account of its corrupt state be considered as dissolved; and that measures be adopted to constitute a new church as a branch of the White Baptist Church.³³

This action of the Association was high-handed, considering that the First African Baptist Church pre-dated it as an entity, did not receive its charter from it, and was one of its founding members. Besides, Article IV of the Association's constitution specifically stated that the Association was "... in no respect, to effect the independence of individual churches."³⁴

At the next annual meeting of the Association, a stronger resolution censuring Marshall was adopted:

³¹Letter to His Honour, William T. Williams, August 13, 1833, *ibid.*, 801-3.

³²John Cromwell, "The Aftermath of Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Journal of Negro History* 5 (July 1920): 232; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto* (New York, 1970), 87.

³³Minutes of the Sunbury Baptist Association, November 1832.

³⁴*Ibid.*, November 1823.

Resolved, that this Association, having undoubted testimony of Andrew Marshall's holding the sentiments avowed by Alexander Campbell, now declares him, and all his followers, to have thrown themselves out of the fellowship of the churches of this Association, and it recommends all of its faith and order to separate from them according to the advice of the Savannah Baptist Church.³⁵

A true test of a leader is his ability to maintain the support of those under his guidance, when the pillars of his authority are undermined in an effort to discredit him. Marshall's congregation did not waver in its support of him, even though it came under great pressure to denounce him and flee to other black churches that had the blessings of the Association and the Savannah Baptist Church.

After the storm passed, Marshall, by his "full renunciation of holding the peculiar sentiments of Alexander Campbell, with which he has been charged," was re-admitted as a member of the Sunbury Baptist Association at its 1837 meeting.³⁶ With repressive state laws on the books, it might have been prudent for him to have capitulated to the demands of Savannah Baptist and the Sunbury Association in 1833 by renouncing Alexander Campbell and prayerfully beseeching the forgiveness of his persecutors; instead, he stood his ground. Andrew Marshall renounced Campbell after reflecting at length upon Campbell's views and eventually concluding that they were inadequate and inconsistent with his own beliefs. This old black preacher was not one to renounce a belief merely because he was instructed to do so; rather, he waited patiently until the truth was revealed to him through the spirit. "I'm going to wait patiently until my change comes or until the spirit moves me" is a sentiment deeply rooted in black evangelical religion; it covers a multitude of situations, including doctrinal ones. Throughout the whole affair, Marshall acted courageously but not arrogantly, an attitude which eased the re-admitting process.

The schism and other actions surrounding the "Alexander Campbell Affair" caused a reduction in the church membership at First African Baptist. When the controversy erupted in 1832, the membership was more than twenty-four hundred; in

³⁵*Ibid.*, November 1833.

³⁶*Ibid.*, November 1837.

1837 when it ended, membership was down to 1,810.³⁷ Some of this loss was due to deaths, change of owners, and other vagaries associated with the peculiar institution, though just how much is impossible to determine.

Regaining the good graces of the Association was beneficial to Marshall. By 1840 church membership reached the 2,016 mark, a figure larger than the combined memberships of all other Baptist churches, white and black, in Savannah. Moreover, at the 1840 convention, Marshall made the unprecedented request that all contributions by First African Baptist to foreign missions be appropriated to "the Liberia African Mission."³⁸ No other church in the SBA made such a request during this period. Since Savannah was one of the ports of debarkation for the American Colonization Society, obviously Marshall was aware of this organization and its efforts in Liberia. A number of black Savannahians, even some from his church, had emigrated there. However, no record exists of his advocacy of colonization.

Throughout his ministry Marshall showed a concerned interest in missions, both foreign and domestic—especially the latter. To him shut-ins' needs were as great as those of the economically destitute. Whenever church members were unable to attend the quarterly communion services because of illness, Marshall sent the deacons to administer this sacrament to them, though the Association in 1843 pronounced this an abuse of the communion. Marshall was ordered to stop this practice or face having his church "rendered disorderly."³⁹ He probably ignored the threat and continued the practice, although with a little more discretion. It is a part of the tradition of black Baptists that the deacons administer Holy Communion to shut-ins.

If the 1830s marked the nadir of his ministry and the 1840s its resurgence, the 1850s marked its summit, for during this period his fame transcended Savannah, the Sunbury Baptist Association, and the state of Georgia to other parts of the United States and even abroad. This venerable black preacher was

³⁷*Ibid.*, November 1837.

³⁸*Ibid.*, November 1840.

³⁹*Ibid.*, November 1843.

considered someone special. Visitors to Savannah, especially foreigners and well-educated Americans, placed worshipping at First African Baptist on their itineraries. Some subsequently published books and articles about their travels, including information on their worship at First African Baptist. In some instances the writers devoted almost a page, or more, to descriptions of the services and commentaries on Marshall's sermons. Their published materials were read in this country and abroad, resulting in high visibility for Marshall and his church.

Marshall was a keen judge of character and an eloquent speaker with a superior mind. A contemporary said that "few men, white or black, of any age, could surpass him in reading human character." This person also said that "his clear intellect was equal to the best distinctions in Theology."⁴⁰ Marshall was also described as possessing "great natural eloquence and a cultivation of delivery acquired by association with his masters, who were gentlemen of education and retirement."⁴¹ The articulation may have been influenced by whites, but his style and message were geared to the educational level of his black congregation; he often cited incidents of his personal experience and tended to ramble as he spoke, to hold the attention of his illiterate flock.

Sir Charles Lyell recorded a sermon in which Marshall conveyed to his members how God acts to save his children who may be on the verge of falling from grace:

... speaking on the probationary state of pious man left for a while to his own guidance, and when in danger of failing saved by the grace of God, he compared it to an eagle teaching her newly fledged offspring to fly by carrying it up high into the air then dropping it, and, if she sees it falling to earth, darting with the speed of lightning to save it before it reaches the ground.⁴²

One of the more moving sermons preached today by black Baptist preachers is entitled "An Eagle Feathereth Its Nest," which expounds upon the example Marshall alluded to in the

⁴⁰Tustin, "Andrew Marshall," 258-59.

⁴¹Charles C. Jones, Jr., *History of Savannah Georgia* (Syracuse, 1890), 511.

⁴²Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America* (New York, 1868), 2:14.

above sermon in 1846. This depiction may not have originated with Marshall, but in the sermon he did it justice, regardless of its origin.

He once addressed the Georgia legislature,⁴³ a first for a black preacher in the state. White visitors worshipped at his church, and there is no record that any left unimpressed with Marshall. Fredericka Bremer, a German visitor in the 1850s, wrote that Marshall "was a powerful, handsome old man, who had acquired property, and who was greatly looked up to by his people as a preacher and baptizer." This visitor also described a common occurrence in the Baptist church: altar call.

... at the close of the service a woman came forth and kneeling before the altar seemed to be under great stress in mind, and the old preacher prayed for her in her sorrow and secret grief a beautiful and heartfelt prayer.⁴⁴

A New York visitor, speaking of a Marshall sermon in glowing terms, said, "I heard him yesterday preach an excellent sermon better than the one I heard in the forenoon at the Independent Presbyterian Church."⁴⁵ He spoke without notes, because he could not write and because his predominantly slave congregation preferred the extemporaneous style of preaching.⁴⁶

Although Marshall did not receive a salary from the First African Baptist, he received regular contributions which amounted to a sizable annual income. By 1848 the assessment of his real estate was \$3,730,⁴⁷ about forty-four percent of the 1824 appraisal but still high for a black by the standard of the day. Furthermore, he owned shares in Marine and Fire Insurance Bank of the State of Georgia and had valuable personal

⁴³Tustin, "Andrew Marshall," 257; Edward R. Carter, *Biographical Sketches of Our Pulpit* (Chicago, 1969), 13.

⁴⁴Bremer, *The Homes of the New World*, 1:354.

⁴⁵Letter dated March 19, 1858, Hale Family Papers, 1858, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

⁴⁶Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors*, 29-30. Bishop Allen said "reading sermons will never prove so beneficial to the colored people as spiritual or extempore preaching." Charles C. Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negro in the United States* (Savannah, 1842), 176. Jones contended that "Negroes require preaching especially adapted to them"; the slaves fell asleep in white churches during the sermon.

⁴⁷City of Savannah Tax Digest, 1848, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

property, but no slaves.⁴⁸ Preaching full time, however, prevented him from devoting the time necessary to expand his business; also, some funds from the business were probably used in the performance of his religious duties and in helping the needy. He once loaned twenty-five hundred dollars to keep a family of twelve from being separated, as his family had been, but was repaid only a small fraction of the amount.

In 1856 Marshall traveled to the North to solicit funds for building a new brick church, because the sixty-year-old wooden structure in which the congregation worshipped had become dilapidated.⁴⁹ His itinerary had to be abbreviated because of illness. The venerable black preacher died in Richmond, Virginia on December 11, 1856, during his journey home.⁵⁰

The death notices of that day and subsequent statements about Marshall accurately assess his place in history. The *Savannah Morning News* reported that

Andrew Marshall, the old colored preacher, so well and favorably known to our citizens, died in Richmond, Virginia, Tuesday last, aged 100 years. Andrew was one of the most gifted of his race . . . [and] had won the respect and esteem of all who knew him.⁵¹

The Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia minutes contained the following statement:

Brother Andrew Marshall, a colored minister of Sunbury Association was indeed, for his race, a great man. He lived to a great age, and for a long time exerted a good influence in Savannah among the colored people.⁵²

⁴⁸Will of Andrew Marshall, 1857, Central Records Office, Chatham County Courthouse, Savannah, Georgia.

⁴⁹Tustin, "Andrew Marshall," 260; Holcombe, *The Georgia Analytical Repository*, 173; *Manual of the Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia Constituted, November 26, 1800* (Savannah, 1860), 5. The building was completed in 1795 but was not dedicated until April 1800; Savannah Baptist was organized the following November.

⁵⁰*Savannah Morning News*, December 11, 1856; Tustin, "Andrew Marshall," 260. For a description of the funeral, one of the largest in Savannah's history, see Joseph F. Waring, *Cerveau's Savannah* (Savannah, 1973), 61-62.

⁵¹*Savannah Morning News*, December 11, 1856.

⁵²*Minutes of the State Convention of the State of Georgia for the Year 1857* (March 1857), 13.

The Sunbury Baptist Association minutes also paid tribute:

The Committee on Deceased ministers beg leave to report . . . The first in the order of time is our aged and venerable "father in Israel" Andrew Marshall, for many years he was the leading religious spirit among his colored brethren and maintained what he so well deserved the respect and confidence of the whole community.⁵³

Emanuel K. Love, himself a gifted preacher and dynamic leader of First African Baptist Church in the late nineteenth century, wrote that "there never has lived a negro in Savannah who was the equal of Reverend Andrew C. Marshall."⁵⁴ Moreover, in his two-volume work, William Harden averred that "Reverend Marshall, probably [was] the most esteemed colored man who ever lived in Savannah."⁵⁵

Andrew Marshall served as pastor of First African Baptist Church for over thirty years, longer than any other pastor of that church. During that time he baptized about thirty-eight hundred, converted over four thousand, and married two thousand persons.⁵⁶ The numbers are impressive. Spending thirty years at the same church, increasing its membership, bringing four thousand new souls to Christ, and baptizing an average of 126 persons annually speak well for his ministry, vitality, and religious leadership. In Marshall's day, no other black preacher had comparable numbers.

According to a white Savannahian who lived during that period, Marshall's congregation "literally worshipped" him.⁵⁷ Marshall was a caring religious leader, who established an active social concerns program in First African Baptist Church to meet the needs of the poor, and he was also a successful businessman, who maintained an active role in his business throughout his tenure as pastor of the church. He showed concern for his extended family—placing a marble tablet on the grave of his aunt (the widow of Andrew Bryan), whom he loved

⁵³Minutes of the Sunbury Baptist Association, November 1857.

⁵⁴Love, *History of the First African Baptist Church*, 44.

⁵⁵William Harden, *A History of Savannah and South Georgia* (Chicago, 1913), 497.

⁵⁶Waring, *Cerveau's Savannah*, 60-61; Tustin, "Andrew Marshall," 256.

⁵⁷William Harden, *Recollections of a Long and Satisfactory Life* (New York, 1968), 32.

dearly,⁵⁸ and bequeathing his silver watch and clothing to his cousin Andrew, a Savannah slave. But he was not above ignoring a city ordinance by driving his dray on the sidewalk⁵⁹ or quarreling with black Baptists in Savannah, who probably felt threatened by him and envious of the high esteem in which he was held. He showed whites proper deference, though not obsequiously.

One concludes that Marshall was stern, strict, and confident and had a presence that distinguished him as a leader. He lived in a large brick house, wore nice clothes, owned a silver watch, and drove a gig—a style of living imitative of well-to-do white Savannahians. Marshall, however, experienced the same disappointments, degradation, hardships, and grief of other Afro-Americans in the South: he was a former slave, whose first wife was sold to a distant slaveowner who terminated the marital relationship; he had an invalid son, who was unable to provide for himself; he experienced the death of his second wife and nineteen of his children; he sustained economic losses during panics in 1819 and 1837; he was administered a public whipping; and he was discriminated against because of his color and denied the leadership roll in the SBA to which his talents and experience entitled him. But he did not let these misfortunes overshadow the limited opportunities available to him, and he prevailed. Obviously, Marshall possessed an indomitable will.

According to available records and other sources of information, Marshall had three wives. His first wife was sold to another plantation, and he never saw her again. His second wife, Rachel, whom he probably married in the early 1800s, died on July 17, 1829, not too long after he assumed the pulpit of First African Baptist Church; she was sixty-four.⁶⁰ In his will, dated July 30, 1852, Marshall bequeathed most of his property to his third wife, Sarah, and to “my sons Joseph” (probably about thirty-one at the time) “and George” (probably

⁵⁸Tablet on the Tomb of Dolly Bryan, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia, May 15, 1836. At the time of her death, she was 97 years old and had been associated with the church since the 1780s.

⁵⁹*Daily Georgian*, February 12, 1842.

⁶⁰Tomb of Rachel Marshall (1765-1829), Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia.

twenty-seven). Joseph and George were offspring of Marshall's second marriage.⁶¹

Marshall's sermons were generally well received. His most effective sermon, however, came not from his pulpit but from the life he lived. As Edgar Guest wrote in his poem "Sermons We See," "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day/ . . . the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds."⁶² In the best Christian tradition, he gave his time, his talent, and his property to his fellow man. As a result of this dedication, he earned the esteem of Afro-Americans and the respect of whites and became an inspirational role model for slaves who wished to be free, as well as for free blacks who wished to be prosperous. It is small wonder, therefore, that men lavished praise on this black religious leader during his lifetime and have continued to do so in the years since his death.

⁶¹Will of Andrew Marshall, Chatham County Register of Free Persons of Color.

⁶²Edgar Guest, "Sermons We See," in Mannie H. Burroughs, *Words of Light and Life Found Here and There* (Washington, D.C., 1949), 15.